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QUESTION ONE: INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ON MINORITY AND MAJORITY STUDENTS:

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Using the Iceberg (quadrant) diagram below, Jim Comins believes that we should be teaching children in Quadrant A & B: Students with "Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills" (BICS) should receive instruction in quadrant A; Students with "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP) should receive instruction in quadrant B; unfortunately most standardized testing (SAT, GRE, NTE . . .) falls in quadrant D.

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                    Cognitive un-demanding
                              |
   dance (with clues)         |    (without clues)
   music                      |
   PE                         |    telephone call or
   cooking                    |    messages on refridge
                              |    (no clues - face to face)
Context-embedded          A   |    C         Context reduced
     ---------------------------------------------
(clues)                   B   |    D
     Math                     |
     Reading                  |    Lecture
     Science                  |
 (manipulative, charts...)    |   (without contextualized
                              |    materials)
                              |
                    Cognitive demanding
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The theory behind BICS and CALP is that students coming into the classroom speaking the dominant language (L1) have five-years of BICS already behind them and once in school begin to develop CALP (which is a lifelong process). For the students coming into the classroom not speaking the dominant language (L2) it takes an additional two to three-years for BICS to fall into place. It generally takes L2 students five to six-years to catch up with L1 students (counting the two- to three-years for BICS acquisition). This is the iceberg model (the underlying work behind the "apparent" language skills).

It should be noted that L2 acquire BICS quicker than L1 students (two to three-years versus five-years). There are a multitude of factors that influence this difference. The language proficiency of the L2 student in his/her native language, the age, and academic exposure are among the factors. But the L2 student's ability to transfer meaning and comprehension from his/her native language is most significant in the students prospects for quick BICS acquisition.

What this means for curriculum and teaching strategies is that teachers need to get rid of the "tabula rasa" model regarding young learners. All students come into the classroom with five-years of "lived" experiences that are reflected in their language skills and shade their "cognitive abilities." Teachers need to mine that resource, those five-years of pre-education education (this most definitely applies to other content areas and not just language acquisition).

good implications

What this means in terms of content is that all students (L1 and L2) can receive instruction in quadrant A subjects in the dominant language. L2 students should receive instruction in quadrant B subjects in their native language at least until their yes BICS in the dominant language is in place (matching the student's proficiency in the content area with the student CALP acquisition would be preferable). ideally L1 should be maintained

Additionally there is concern about possible confusion developing with multiple language usage. The idea behind this concern is that the dominance of one language means the loss of the other language (native to the student), that only one language can exist in the student's mind at a time (not doubt an American theory). To this concern a balloon model has been suggested. This model implies that as the second language is acquired more room is made for in the student's "language center" (not losing the native language of L2 students is dependent on continued usage of the language, this is particularly true of very young learners). Again, the philosophy is to use the resource of the L2 student's prior language proficiency in acquiring proficiency in the dominant language. The failure of the old ESL methods, according to Cummins Comins, is that they were based on Behaviorist theories which attempted to reduce language acquisition into smaller sequential parts. Krashen adds that old ALM theories taught students about the "parts of speech" but not "speaking" (this is applicable to the typical high school foreign language courses). A corollary "Comprehensible Input Hypothesis" suggests that students spend time on acquisition (early students - twice a week, no grammar book or weekly vocabulary words for two- to three-years) before spending time on "learning" (writing up nifty conjugation charts and all).

good analysis

QUESTION TWO: UNEQUAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES:

Very thorough

good intro

As the question implies, there are a multitude of factors which contribute to unequal educational outcomes. What most of these factors have in common is an over-simplified assumption that all students are the same. One version of this assumption is that we are all White, Euro-centric, English-speaking, Male, Christian, "Able-bodied", and middle-class, with a stable two-parent home-life. If that is not the assumption than the assumption is the "tabula rasa" assumption---that nothing that happens/happened outside of school has any meaningful influence on what happens inside school. Both ideas assume that all students are the same, one assuming that all student come from the same place and the other only focused on how students are the same in the classroom. But as the statistics indicate today's student population is hardly cut from the same cloth (not that it was in the past---more likely no one ever thought to ask).

One way that these assumptions are translated into the classroom is in testing and tracking. Out a desire to "better meet the needs of the students" a teacher might group his/her class into ability-groups. Generally ability-grouping is based on some form of testing, usually some "standardized" test. Unfortunately standardized testing generally only "work" across a single-intelligence or modality and in fact tell a tester more about the student's ability to successfully navigate a standardized test than about the student's proficiency level on the subject supposedly being tested. Also, it has been proven that standardized tests tend to reflect macroculture language/cultural values which places students from different SES, language, cultural, and having educational exposure at a definite disadvantage. Thus, placing students in ability groups based on standardized testing places certain students at a disadvantage. And then the ability groups (tracking) tends to communicate lower expectation levels to those in the lower ability groups. Whereas the teacher's intention may be to be sensitive to the students' abilities, ability-grouping takes this difference and makes it into a liability rather than an asset. Setting up a

good observation

practical idea

system of peer-tutoring or Learning Centers for those who finish assignments before other would be preferable to such a destructive way of pointing out differences as ability-grouping tends to do.

Instruction which focuses on one intelligence-type or teaching-modality is another way that "student sameness" is translated into the classroom. Basing one's educational practice on having the students "reading the chapter in the book by themselves and answering the questions in the back" reduces education to a boring paper-shuffle routine and ignores five of the seven recognized intelligence modalities. Such a practice is guaranteed to favor those whose abilities support verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligence and place those who support the other five at a disadvantage. Without appealing to various cultural stereotypes, the classroom should reflect the panoply of intelligences in its instruction as well as in its testing.

Besides tracking, testing and appealing to one intelligence, how a teacher interacts with his/her classroom day-in and day-out is the most influential of the "student sameness" factors. Studies have shown gender preferential behavior among teachers toward male students both in instruction and "behavioral norms." Instructionally teachers have shown a tendency to ask male students follow-up "why" questions to their in-class responses whereas no such follow-ups are afforded the females. Beside increased attention this practice says something, albeit most likely unintended, about the value of the male's response versus the value of the female's response. Granted, some teachers who seem to do this are working from the belief that males are more reluctant to work in the classroom and thus the teacher will work harder at getting the males to participate. Unfortunately a social stereotype about "boys in class" is catered to rather than corrected. Correcting this stereotype also leads into behavioral preferences that males receive.

Male students tend to be valued outside the classroom if they are active, adventurous, aggressive, assertive, curious, frank, independent or inventive. What this translates into is mixed massages about "inside" and "outside" the classroom behavior. As noted above, a teacher might work with a male student more thus communicating a value message to the females in the classroom. Also females are not encourage to explore the personality traits which were attributed to males at the beginning of this paragraph. Teachers need to realize that a given student's gender is a biological reality that has *some* influence on personality and behavior. How the student takes that and combines it with all the other factors which influence personality and then translates that back into her femininity or his masculinity is another expression of how we are not all the same---even in the things we cannot choose.

QUESTION THREE-B: CURRICULUM APPROACH WITH ISSUES:

Potentially controversial issues, if they were taught in the past, were cloaked in the assumptions of the macroculture----"we're all White, Euro-centric, English-speaking, Male, Christian, 'Able-bodied', and middle-class, with a stable two-parent home-life in here, aren't we?" Things have changed since then. The pendulum has taken several swings since then. In the name of objectivity, Religion was thrown out. Culture, Race and Gender have been included (if but in a passing reference in a unit on diversity). But this is hardly an approach to teaching these issues.

x5

It should be recognized that if social studies, history, politics, civics, or philosophy are going to be taught at all the atmosphere in the classroom will have to be opened up. Because teaching is no longer the process of depositing data into the skulls of students it is necessary to be more inclusive in our instruction. What this translates into is asking "why" questions. Unfortunately asking "why" questions is meaningless if the "how" or "what" have been glossed over. This is most evident when discussing/teaching in subject matters that deal with religion (as in social studies, history, politics, civics, or philosophy). So what does the teacher do?

Rule number one: begin from the prospective of the students in the classroom and community where the school is located. Teaching about the first Thanksgiving to a classroom predominantly populated by first generation Asian students might be meaningless without talking about the concept of Thanksgiving in the Asian cultures.

Rule number two: Be inclusive. Religion, SES, Gender, Exceptionality, Culture, and Race are all realities and parts of the human experience. It is not the role of the teacher to validate or invalidate a student's religious background, but when studying the culture of a given area, the religion of that area should be fairly dealt with as an on-going expression of the beliefs of those people. Things need to be kept in context. Beliefs: religious, cultural, racial, gender; were not developed in a vacuum. Thus, they cannot be taught in a vacuum nor can the background that generated these beliefs be adequately taught without including the beliefs.

or minorities

powerful statement!

Rule number three: don't water down the content because "we're dealing with children here." Context, complexity, connections and enthusiasm on the part of the teacher goes a long way toward making a potentially controversial subject approachable and appreciated. The students themselves will weed out what they can grasp and appropriate. We rob them of that process when we try to make things "palatable." The only thing that results are boring lessons that seem disconnected and do no justice to the subject being taught.